



Mail Order Scams Preying on Latino Consumers

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MADISON – Over the past two years, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) has seen a steady increase in calls from Latino consumers complaining of unscrupulous practices by mail order companies. Hispanics statewide have been specifically targeted in scams that began as phone, online or mail-based purchases of goods, but that turned into aggressive and threatening demands for additional money or purchases.

Here are three examples of mail order scams reported to DATCP by consumers:

- A Milwaukee man ordered vitamins that were advertised in Spanish on the radio. He felt that the vitamins did not live up to the promises in the ad. Although the consumer wanted to cancel future orders, the company continued to send vitamins and expensive bills each month. A company “lawyer” then called, threatening to sue for \$10,000 if the man did not continue to purchase the product.
- A Madison consumer received a sales call where a Spanish-speaking salesperson offered two cell phones and a calling plan at a great price. When the package arrived, the consumer found only two perfume bottles inside the box, each filled with water. The company will not answer her calls.
- An elderly couple from Madison received a sales call offering books for English learners. They did not want to purchase the books. The company continued calling, claiming that they had recorded the consumers saying “yes” to the sales offer and therefore they had to pay. The company threatened to sue for thousands of dollars if the couple did not send a money order.

What you need to know about unordered merchandise:

- **Make sure** the merchandise you receive in the mail is something you actually ordered. You are not responsible for any unordered goods you receive in the mail.
- **It is illegal** for someone sending unsolicited goods to try to collect payment. However, be careful – by taking an action such as signing a postcard or making an oral agreement over the phone, you may have agreed to buy the goods without realizing it.
- A **negative option plan** is a sale in which products are automatically sent on a periodic basis after an initial purchase. To protect yourself, contact the company in writing to cancel any future orders and return all unwanted goods.
- The **three-day right to cancel** may apply to certain transactions such as phone, mail order and door-to-door sales. In those transactions, sellers must give consumers three days to cancel a purchase and must notify consumers of this right in writing. The three-day cancellation period does not begin until the seller has furnished written notice of this right. Call the Wisconsin Bureau of Consumer Protection for more information on which purchases are covered by this protection.

Remember:

- Write down the name and address of the company and the date of your purchase.
- Keep all ads, canceled checks and any other pertinent information.
- In most of the mail order scams reported to DATCP, sellers have specifically requested payment by money order upon delivery of the item. Beware of companies that demand a money order or cash on delivery (COD) as the sole form of payment.

(MORE)

If you encounter problems with a mail order purchase, visit the Bureau of Consumer Protection at <http://datcp.wisconsin.gov>, send an e-mail to datcphpline@wisconsin.gov or call the Consumer Protection Hotline toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.

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